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S E C R E T SECTION 02 OF 02 ROME 000292

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/23/2013

TAGS: [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [MARR](#) [EAIR](#) [MOPS](#) [MARR](#) [EAIR](#) [MOPS](#) [MARR](#) [EAIR](#) [IT](#) [ITPREL](#) [ITPREL](#) [IRAQI](#) [FREEDOM](#) [FORCES](#) [IN](#) [ITALY](#)

SUBJECT: KEEPING ITALIAN SUPPORT STRONG

TRANSIT OF US MILITARY PERSONNEL THROUGH ITALIAN MILITARY  
AIRFIELDS ONLY, AND THAT BOTH HAD RATIFIED HIS DECISION.

16. (C) COMMENT. THE GOI CLEARLY IS OPERATING IN A PRESSURE  
COOKER OF PUBLIC AND PARLIAMENTARY ANXIETY ABOUT POSSIBLE  
MILITARY OPERATIONS IN IRAQ. AS MARTINO TOLD THE AMBASSADOR,  
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SHARING -- WHAT THE PM'S RIGHT-HAND, GIANNI LETTA, DESCRIBED  
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POLITICAL ATTACKS -- MAY MARGINALLY ADD TO THE TIME NEEDED TO  
PROCESS OUR REQUESTS, BUT THE GOI - AT THE TOP LEVEL -  
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ACTION EUR-00

INFO	LOG-00	NP-00	AID-00	ACQ-00	CIAE-00	INL-00	DOTE-00
	PERC-00	SRPP-00	DS-00	EAP-00	EB-00	FAAE-00	VC-00
	H-01	TEDE-00	INR-00	IO-00	L-00	VCE-00	AC-01
	NSAE-00	NSCE-00	OMB-01	DHS-00	PA-00	PM-00	PRS-00
	ACE-00	P-00	SCT-00	SP-00	IRM-00	SSO-00	SS-00
	TRSE-00	T-00	USIE-00	EPAE-00	PMB-00	DSCC-00	PRM-00
	DRL-02	G-00	NFAT-00	SAS-00	/005W		
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FM AMEMBASSY ROME  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7812  
INFO SECDEF WASHDC IMMEDIATE  
JOINT STAFF WASHDC IMMEDIATE  
USCINCCENT MACDILL AFB FL IMMEDIATE

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REF: A. 02 ROME 6167

- 1B. ROME 0009
- 1C. ROME 0183
- 1D. IIR 6 850 0064 03
- 1E. IIR 6 850 0074 03

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CLASSIFIED BY: DEPUTY CHIEF OF MISSION EMIL SKODON FOR REASONS 1.5(B),  
(D)

1. (S) SUMMARY AND COMMENT. WHILE PM BERLUSCONI'S SUPPORT  
FOR THE US APPROACH TO IRAQ REMAINS RELIABLE, THE GOI - WITH  
EXTREME CAUTION - IS LAYING THE GROUNDWORK FOR AN EVENTUAL  
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE AND VOTE ON THE EXTENT OF ITALY'S  
SUPPORT. (REF A). THE GOI CONTINUES TO WORK WITH US TO FIND  
WAYS TO SAY "YES" TO OUR REQUESTS, BUT INCREASING PUBLIC AND  
PARLIAMENTARY PRESSURE MEAN THAT THE GOVERNMENT MUST PROCEED  
CAUTIOUSLY AFTER CAREFUL REVIEW (REFS B, C, D). POST  
APPRECIATES EFFORTS TO IMPROVE INTERAGENCY COORDINATION AND

PROVIDE ADVANCE NOTICE. OUR CONTACTS HAVE STRESSED THAT EARLY NOTICE (24 HOURS AT A MINIMUM) AND CONTINUED COORDINATION WITH MILITARY AND POLITICAL LEADERS IS THE BEST WAY TO HELP ITALY TO HELP US. END SUMMARY AND COMMENT.

12. (C) THE GOI IS WORKING TO ACCOMMODATE SEVERAL RECENT USG MILITARY REQUESTS FOR OVERFLIGHT AND LOGISTICAL SUPPORT FOR IRAQ-RELATED CONTINGENCY OPERATIONS. HOWEVER, SENIOR MOD AND MFA OFFICIALS HAVE UNDERScoreD AGAIN THE IMPORTANCE OF CLOSE COORDINATION AND ADVANCE NOTICE IN THE CURRENT SENSITIVE POLITICAL CLIMATE. EVEN OPERATIONS THAT HAVE BEEN TREATED AS ROUTINE IN THE PAST ARE SUBJECT TO CLOSER SCRUTINY. FOR EXAMPLE, SHORT-NOTICE DELTA CONTRACT MILITARY TRANSPORT FLIGHTS THROUGH CIVILIAN AIRPORTS ARE BEING REDIRECTED BY THE GOI AWAY FROM ROME'S MAIN AIRPORT BECAUSE OF THEIR GREATER PUBLIC SENSITIVITY (SEE BELOW).

13. (C) IN A JANUARY 24 CONVERSATION WITH DCM, MFA POLITICAL DIRECTOR GIANCARLO ARAGONA NOTED THAT ITALY IS UNDER  
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CONSIDERABLE PRESSURE FROM SOME EU MEMBERS TO MODULATE ITS SUPPORT FOR POSSIBLE US MILITARY ACTION IN IRAQ. BANNER HEADLINES IN THE ITALIAN PRESS (INACCURATELY) SPINNING WHITE HOUSE STATEMENTS ABOUT ITALIAN SUPPORT MADE IT EVEN MORE DIFFICULT FOR ITALY TO POSITIVELY INFLUENCE EU POSITIONS, ARAGONA SAID. DEFENSE MINISTER MARTINO'S DIPLOMATIC ADVISOR ECHOED ARAGONA'S CONCERNS IN A JANUARY 24 MEETING WITH A/POL-MIL COUNSELOR, ADDING THAT IT WOULD BE A TOPIC OF DISCUSSION AT A COUNCIL OF MINISTER'S MEETING LATER THAT DAY. EVEN THE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER MENTIONED THE FEEDING FRENZY IN THE PRESS TO THE DCM AT A JANUARY 23 EVENT, ADDING THAT THE PM, DEFMIN, FM AND DEP. PM HAD AGREED AT A MINI CABINET MEETING EARLIER IN THE DAY TO CONTINUE TO SUPPORT THE USG REQUEST FOR OVERFLIGHTS AND BASE ACCESS.

14. (C) PM BERLUSCONI AND OTHER MINISTERS, RESPONDING TO PRESS INQUIRIES ABOUT THE REPORTS FROM WASHINGTON ON THURSDAY AND FRIDAY, WERE CONSTRAINED TO EMPHASIZE THAT ITALY HAS MADE NO DECISIONS ON MILITARY PARTICIPATION, THAT SUCH A DECISION WOULD HAVE TO BE SUBMITTED TO THE PARLIAMENT, AND THAT THE GOI STRONGLY WISHES TO SEE EXPLICIT UN ENDORSEMENT OF ANY MILITARY ACTION. EMBASSY HAS CIRCULATED WIDELY, IN ENGLISH AND IN ITALIAN, EXCERPTS FROM THE TRANSCRIPT SHOWING WHAT WAS ACTUALLY SAID AT THE WASHINGTON PRESS CONFERENCE, BUT IT WILL BE HARD TO ROLL BACK THE MISINTERPRETATIONS FOSTERED IN THE PUBLIC AND MUCH OF PARLIAMENT. THAT THE TOP GOI OFFICIALS ARE DISCUSSING WHAT WOULD NORMALLY BE ROUTINE ACCESS REQUESTS IS ONE SIGN THAT THE VOLATILE POLITICAL SCENE IS FORCING THE GOVERNMENT TO PROCEED VERY CAREFULLY, WITH AN EYE ON THE MOOD OF THE PUBLIC, PARLIAMENT, AND ITS EU AND NATO ALLIES. PUT SIMPLY, THE GOVERNMENT FEELS OBLIGED TO DEMONSTRATE THAT IT  
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HAS NOT SIMPLY HANDED A BLANK CHECK TO THE USG.

15. (S) THE GOI'S JANUARY 24 DECISION TO REDIRECT DELTA CONTRACT FLIGHTS TRANSPORTING ARMED AND UNIFORMED US MILITARY PERSONNEL WITH WEAPONS AND AMMO FROM ROME'S COMMERCIAL AIRPORT (FIUMICINO) TO A MILITARY AIRFIELD (REF E) IS ANOTHER SIGN THAT, WHILE WE CAN EXPECT GOI SUPPORT FOR OUR REQUESTS, IT WILL NOT BE UNCONDITIONAL. VCHOD'S FIRST REACTION WHEN BRIEFED BY DATT (WHO HAD LEARNED OF THE MATTER HOURS BEFORE) THAT DELTA FLIGHTS WERE DUE TO BEGIN ARRIVING THE NEXT MORNING AT FIUMICINO WAS DISBELIEF, FOLLOWED BY WILLINGNESS TO MOVE THE MATTER FORWARD TO THE DEFMIN AND OTHER RELEVANT MINISTRIES (MINISTRY OF INTERIOR, CIVIL AVIATION AUTHORITY). LATER THAT EVENING, VCHOD NOTIFIED DATT THAT THE FLIGHTS COULD NOT TRANSIT ITALIAN CIVIL AIRPORTS BUT OFFERED THE US USE OF A MILITARY AIR BASE, SUCH AS SIGONELLA, AVIANO OR EVEN PRACTICA DI MARE (20 KM SOUTH OF ROME). (NOTE: EMBASSY IS NOW COORDINATING WITH DELTA AND USAIRWAYS REPRESENTATIVES TO REDIRECT THE FLIGHTS, WHICH REPORTEDLY HAVE BEEN TRANSITING TROOPS THROUGH ITALY SINCE JANUARY 21. END NOTE.) BOTH VCHOD AND DEFMIN'S DIPLOMATIC ADVISOR CAUTIONED THAT IT MAY BE NECESSARY TO ADVISE PARLIAMENT AT LEAST 24 HOURS PRIOR TO BEGINNING THE TRANSIT FLIGHTS. LATE ON JANUARY 24, DEFMIN MARTINO TOLD THE AMBASSADOR THAT HE HAD INFORMED PM BERLUSCONI AND PRESIDENT CIAMPI OF HIS DECISION TO PERMIT

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ACTION EUR-00

INFO	LOG-00	NP-00	AID-00	ACQ-00	CIAE-00	DOTE-00	PERC-00
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	P-00	SCT-00	SP-00	IRM-00	SSO-00	SS-00	TRSE-00
	T-00	USIE-00	EPAE-00	PMB-00	DSCC-00	PRM-00	DRL-02
	G-00	NFAT-00	SAS-00	/005W			

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